

The findings and recommendations described below emerged from work completed in Sumer 2022, and were presented during the HDFS departmental retreat in August 2022. They represent what students, alumni, and advising staff identified as essential for creating a more robust, appealing, and vibrant student experience in HDFS.

1. Focused Tracks and Certificate Programs

Findings indicate that students would benefit from focused tracks and certificate programs.

Providing focused tracks for the HDFS major will:

- Help students understand and articulate the learning goals of the HDFS curriculum and specific learning outcomes related to major-specific requirements
- Provide students with a clear pathway to professional careers
- Attract new students to the major and retain currently enrolled students
- Enable us to remain competitive with and/or exceed offerings provided by other departments of Human Development and/or Family Studies
- Highlight the unique offerings, content knowledge, and resources that exist in HDFS and Human Ecology

Recommendation is to offer focused tracks within the HDFS major that reflect current research and areas of investigation in the field of human development and students' academic interests and professional aspirations.

2. Community and Sense of Belonging

Students would like to experience a stronger sense of community and belonging within the HDFS major and Human Ecology.

In particular, students would like:

- More intentional and interpersonal networking events
- Dedicated space for engaging in collaborative work (i.e., student-student, student-faculty, and student-mentor interactions)
- An engaging and thriving "between class culture" that would enable them to build meaningful relationships with other students and faculty members in HDFS and across Human Ecology majors (e.g., BIPOC)
- Opportunities to showcase and share their work and academic/professional interests with peers, faculty, and community stakeholders

Recommendation is to establish a Learning Innovation Lab that would operate as a center to connect students within HDFS and across all Human Ecology majors, solicit ongoing input from faculty, and practice Design Thinking skills in collaboration with other students, faculty, and community partners.

In addition to the Learning Innovation Lab, other recommendations to foster a strong sense of community and belonging are to: (a) create a HDFS Young Alumni Council or HDFS Alumni Board of Advisors; (b) revitalize the HDFS undergraduate student organization; and (c) establish a Design Thinking Partnership for Community Enhancement.

3. Curriculum of Consequence

Students desire a more rigorous, formative, engaging, and updated curriculum that is aligned with focused tracks and provides sequential and scaffolded courses.

In particular, students would like:

- Courses that offer a “deep dive” or an in-depth understanding of foundational theories, research, and applied practices in human development
- Opportunities to enroll in a sequence of courses across all four years (i.e., students indicated that they can complete course requirements in two years so they are in major-specific classes with first- and second-year students)
- A more formative curriculum that would enable them to acquire and practice professional skills so that they can be impacted and “practice human development” for others (e.g., soft skills like empathic listening for individual and collective impact)
- More substance, more connection, and more course content that enables them to learn the history, language, and current/future issues that are unique to the field of Human Ecology (i.e., What content distinguishes the major from other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, educational psychology, etc?)

Recommendation is to re-imagine an undergraduate curriculum that includes the following actionable steps:

- Revise existing courses and/or develop new courses that are more clearly organized, sequential, and targeted for specific learning outcomes related to specific tracks
- Expose students to major-specific content over multiple years, thereby reinforcing concepts and content when it is most relevant to students (i.e., distinguish ‘short-stay’ students from ‘long-stay’ students)
- Optimize class size to adequately meet course learning outcomes
- Create opportunities for students to obtain in-depth understanding of foundational course constructs and theories (e.g., attachment theory, role theory, relationship science)
- Integrate more professional skills-based learning into courses
- Offer courses that reflect the expertise of faculty and the professional goals of our students (e.g., nonviolent communication, emotional development, mindfulness)

4. Applied Experiences

Findings indicate that students desire more applied and human-centered learning experiences to develop personal capacities that would enable them to solve real-world challenges in a variety of professions.

Recommendation is to create applied learning experiences that utilize design thinking principles and make it possible for students to work collaboratively with students across other Human Ecology majors (e.g., HDFS x Interior Architecture x Personal Finance x Consumer Behavior & Marketplace Studies x Community & Nonprofit Leadership).

A comprehensive set of applied learning experiences would ‘connect the pipes’ and nurture students’ learning and professional development. In particular, it would:

- Enable students to understand the relevance and potential impact of their major as it applies to people and communities beyond the School of Human Ecology

- Immerse students in communities of practice so that professional relationships develop and personal connections are made
- Provide students with practical skills to become effective practitioners and researchers
- Enable faculty to share their expertise and professional network connections with students
- Inform employers and community partners about majors in Human Ecology and the interests and unique skill sets of our students

5. Development of an Integrated HDFS and Human Ecology Capstone

Students desire a Human Ecology Capstone experience to integrate systems thinking and as they transition to the job market and/or graduate and professional school programs.

Recommendation is to offer a school-wide capstone experience that reflects the integrative nature of Human Ecology and utilizes systems thinking and design thinking principles.

This type of capstone experience would typically be completed during students' final year of undergraduate study and would:

- Provide an integrative, high-impact experience that enables students to engage with authentic audiences and generate solutions that have a 'real world' impact
- Demonstrate how content knowledge learned in the classroom can be applied in a meaningful and relevant way
- Enhance students' collaborative problem-solving skills which are among the most highly sought after skills by employers today
- Require students to work with a mixed group of peers, graduate students, and faculty members to complete a project that applies a human ecological perspective to a real-world challenge
- Provide students with a valuable and year-long experience that would make them more desirable to future employers, graduate programs, scholarship committees, and professional schools
- Provide students with 'educational artifacts' that demonstrate their knowledge and skills to employers, campus scholarship committees, international scholarships programs (e.g., Rhodes, Fulbright, Phi Kappa Phi), and graduate and professional school programs
- Improve recruitment efforts by having students attend events (on campus and off campus) to promote the major (e.g., high schools, Madison College, etc.)
- Work in conjunction with the newly created student Ambassador Program in Human Ecology, thereby creating an efficient process for training peer advisors and supervising the programs
- Provide feedback about the student experience (i.e., continuous improvement)